

## THE LIMA STATEMENT AND THE ORTHODOX

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Orthodox reaction to the Lima statement on baptism, eucharist and ministry (BEM) has been overwhelmingly positive. There appear to be at least three reasons for this.

The Orthodox are pleased with BEM first of all because they find the statement, both in spirit and content, to be, quite simply, a very good one. What is said, Orthodox commentators generally believe, as well as the way it is said, is basically sound and right. The document presents a view of baptism, eucharist and ministry with which the Orthodox can for the most part heartily agree. It clearly indicates areas where further study and clarification are required. And it points up issues where obvious disagreements and difficulties persist. As a "consensus statement" on the present state of affairs concerning the issues in question, the Lima statement is considered by the Orthodox, as I see it, to be remarkably successful.

Another reason why the Orthodox are happy with BEM in my observation is that the statement comes from a body of theologians who, if not officially representing their respective churches, are still confirmed in their work by their ecclesiastical leadership in an official manner. Since virtually all Christian confessions are represented in the composition of the documents, including many that are not members of the WCC—such as the Roman Catholics (who are, however, officially members of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission)—the Lima statement becomes the most inclusive and most official Christian ecumenical statement on its theme ever produced. For this reason alone, Orthodox commentators believe it is to be received and responded to with the greatest respect.

A third reason why the Orthodox are pleased with BEM is that they have always insisted that faith and order, doctrine and worship, are at the very heart of ecclesiastical life and ecumenical activity. They have held the position since the beginnings of the modern ecumenical movement, in which they have always enthusiastically par-

ticipated (though never without frustration, confusion and serious difficulties, both among themselves and with—and for—others), that the movement is primarily, if not exclusively, for the purpose of bringing divided Christians into doctrinal and sacramental unity in the one Church of Christ. Cooperation, where possible, in mission and evangelism, and in social action and charitable works, has always been blessed by the Orthodox as of critical importance. But of greatest importance is the essential unity of all Christians in the one, apostolic faith of Jesus Christ, which is expressed and participated in the sacramental and liturgical life of the one Church which he has established. For divided, disordered, disagreeing Christians to be united in one body, with one mind and one mouth, they must be brought to the point where their baptismal, eucharistic and ministerial beliefs and actions are substantially, though not necessarily formally, the same. The publication of BEM, which is as much a doctrinal as it is a sacramental, ritual and practical statement, takes up this issue and places it squarely before the churches. This fact alone, especially considering the authorship of the document, makes Orthodox hearts rejoice. They believe that a very special "moment of truth" has arrived; what Geoffrey Wainwright has called a "critical" moment in every sense of the word—a moment of judgment and a moment of decision. How the churches react and respond to the Lima statement will reveal where they really stand and where their interests really lie. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." BEM will demonstrate with little doubt where are the churches' treasures and hearts. For this to be made plain at this moment in history, at least for the Orthodox, is of the greatest importance and significance.

### *Questions for the Churches*

Three questions are commonly raised by the Orthodox regarding possible reaction to the Lima statement by the Roman Catholic and particularly the Protestant churches. One has to do with the ability of the various bodies to respond to the statement in an authoritative, unified manner. Many Orthodox are of the opinion that most Protestant churches, and perhaps even the Roman Catholic Church, are no longer capable of acting authoritatively as churches because they have lost the sense of "collegiality" within their membership—what the Slavs call *sobornost* (the ability to act in harmony, freely and voluntarily, with one mind and mouth, on issues of faith and worship)—and have no hierarchical structure capable of acting

decisively in the name of all of the believers of the given community. Such a concern, of course, may be directed at the Orthodox themselves, but most Orthodox church leaders and theologians are confident that the doctrinal and liturgical identity shared by all the Orthodox (referring here, of course, to the Byzantine-Chalcedonian churches) together with their clearly hierarchical structure, which calls the respective episcopal synods of the self-governing churches to voice their church's official response, should guarantee a unified position on the part of all, despite their greatly, and gravely, differing cultural, social and political situations in this world.

Another concern of the Orthodox is that some churches may choose to give an interpretation to the Lima statement that will allow them to subscribe to its words while providing a meaning quite consciously known to be different from what the text intends to say, and what other church bodies are believed to defend and practice. In a word, the worry here is that each church will interpret BEM in its own way, while freely acknowledging, if not outrightly encouraging, others to do the same, claiming that this is in any case all that can be done—and the only thing to be done if the document is to be received by the churches in a way that will result in the mutual recognition and common sacramental worship that may, one day, lead to ultimate unification. The Orthodox, with one voice, have always opposed such an approach to ecumenical activity. They have consistently insisted that while words, symbols and rites may legitimately vary among Christian churches, the meaning that they convey and celebrate must be one and the same. Otherwise there is factually no unity, but a mere facade—nominal and contrived, and ultimately false and deceiving.

The greatest anxiety found among Orthodox commentators on the Lima statement finally is that some churches will not treat it at all seriously because they consider the issues with which it deals to be secondary and unimportant. A measure of cynicism may even enter at this point, if not open contempt and hostility toward those who hold BEM to be of critical significance. This may result in responses, or the absence of responses, that will gravely obstruct, if not totally destroy, the chance for unity among Christians as understood and desired by the Orthodox. Thus, there are Orthodox who fear not only that some churches will prove themselves unable to respond to BEM as churches, and others that may do so in a merely formal manner, but that there are others still that may treat the whole effort with indifference, cynicism or outright contempt. As stated above, however, even to know this has its advantage, according to the Orthodox.

*Specific Issues of Concern*

In addition to the general concerns about the Lima statement raised by the Orthodox, several specific issues arise when its various parts are examined. In the section on baptism the greatest concern has to do with the distinction and relationship between baptism and chrismation; the relationship of baptism and chrismation to the eucharist; and the place of children, particularly infants, relative to these sacraments. Orthodox hold that baptism by immersion is a person's Easter (Pascha) and that chrismation, which is a person's Pentecost, must necessarily accompany baptism in every instance as a distinct act. As Christ and the Spirit are not the same—yet never separated—and as the passover of Christ's death and resurrection is distinct from the coming of the Holy Spirit—yet never divided from it—so baptism and chrismation (which is not easily identified with the "confirmation" of any of the western churches, varying as the understandings and practices are) must also always be united with appropriate theological, liturgical and spiritual distinctions that allow each act to be what it is in harmony with the other. The Orthodox generally find the baptism statement greatly lacking at this point.

There is also a lack of clarity about the relationship of baptism (and chrismation) with the eucharist. Orthodox hold that baptized (and chrismated) people, including infants, are led directly and necessarily to the eucharistic table for holy communion. They find it incomprehensible that a baptized person would be denied access to the eucharist. And if "confirmations" of various sorts are to parallel Orthodox "chrismation," then the communion of a person before or without "confirmation" would be problematic for the Orthodox, not to say outrightly unacceptable. Here, as we shall see again, the case of children is of particular importance.

Orthodox also are displeased about the language of "believers" and "adult" baptism. They do not consider it appropriate to imply that children are "nonbelievers," especially when they are members of believing families and/or are in the care of and share their lives with believing adults. They hold that children in the latter circumstances must be baptized (and so partake of the eucharist) if they are to develop normally as persons in community, both Christian and "human." There is no valid reason, in Orthodox opinion, for excluding such children from full participation in the gracious life of Christ's Church. They see in the behavior of children in such circumstances signs of willing participation in the Church's sacramental life in no sense different from or inferior to that of

retarded or senile adults (not to speak of the nominal, cynical, indifferent or plainly unworthy adult members who participate sacramentally in virtually all of the churches). The issue of children is not small or secondary for the Orthodox. It is of crucial importance not only in respect to the sacraments, but in respect to Christian understandings and practices regarding childhood and children. It is also, as we shall see, of paramount importance for the Orthodox themselves in regard to their own "domestic," as well as "ecumenical," behavior.

The issues that emerge among the Orthodox relative to the eucharist section when considering Roman Catholic and Reformed responses to BEM have to do primarily with what can be called the modern "western" language, categories and problematics in which the section is generally cast. There is still a lack of attention to the essential connection between the eucharist and the very being of the Church as it is constituted and structured in time and space. There is still a reduction of the eucharistic mystery to what happens to the bread and the wine, rather than to what happens to the whole of the gathering, not to speak of the whole Church, and creation itself. There is still the use of such problematic and, for the Orthodox, nontraditional expressions as "real presence"; and such ambiguous categories as that of "sign." How the eucharist is a sacrifice, if indeed it is, must yet be clarified, together with other critical issues, like the relationship of the leader of the eucharistic action to the ordained ministry and to the nonordained members of the royal priesthood of all believers. And there is, as we have seen and will see again, the issue of the relationship of the eucharist to baptism (and chrismation), particularly in regard to infants and young children.

For the Orthodox, the eucharist is the actualization of the Church in the time and space of this age and this world. It is the "locus" of the Church's self-expression and self-constitution, the "place" where the Church becomes herself, proclaiming, celebrating and experiencing her gospel, her doctrine, her scriptural interpretation, her vision of reality, her very being and life as God's final covenanted community with his creation—the mystical and sacramental actualization on earth, here and now, of that kingdom of God which will come in power at the end of the world in the parousia of Christ. As such the Church is not just the anamnesis (remembrance) and anticipation of God's kingdom. Nor is she merely its effective "sign." She is its very *presence*, here and now—which presence is revealed in the eucharistic mystery in which not only the bread and wine, but the gathering itself, becomes "holy communion,"

the body of Christ. The Lima statement tends to such a view, according to most of its Orthodox interpreters, and they appreciate it sincerely. But, according to them, its scriptural, apostolic, early Christian and traditionally Christian affirmations remain obstructed and distorted by the Reformation/Counter-Reformation problematics and categories with which it deals and according to which it is still for the most part formulated.

The section on the ministry, according to most Orthodox examiners, suffers the same weaknesses. Its fundamental approach is sound and its intentions are good, but its attempt to formulate a clear distinction between the ordained ministry and the ministry of the nonordained, between the ordained priests and the "priesthood of all believers"—both of which are rooted in the unique high priesthood of Christ and are each, in their own ways, expressions of it—remains ambiguous in what it practically proposes for reception by the churches. The longest of the sections, it obviously deals with the most difficult issues not only theologically, but practically, bureaucratically and personally. Church organizations and living people are directly involved; their rights and their privileges, as well as their pay and their power, are directly called into question. And the hardest and most divisive issue has to do with the ministerial ordination of women, which raises questions not only about the priesthood and episcopate, but about the very nature of human beings as created in God's image and likeness. In a word, the issue here is about God himself, and so about Christianity, the Church and life itself. Orthodox generally hold that the answer to the questions about the ordination of women contains the answers to all theological questions. To the present day, the Orthodox unanimously oppose the ordination of women to the presbyterate and episcopate, while searching for an appropriate theological explanation for their position. It does not appear at all likely, with or without an accepted theological formulation on the subject, that the Orthodox are prepared to recognize their own faith and life in any church that has ordained women ministers.

### *Judgment on the Orthodox*

While the Orthodox generally believe that the Lima statement will be more difficult to deal with for the Protestant churches than for themselves or the Roman Catholics, both in regard to its content and to its call for official and authoritative response, it is clear that the document confronts the Orthodox with many serious questions and difficult decisions.

It remains to be seen, first of all, how seriously the statement will be taken by the Orthodox churches, including theologians and people, and how far Orthodox leaders are willing to go in recognizing the sacramental teachings and practices of other Christian bodies as compatible in essence, if not in form, with their own. This issue exacerbates a strong debate already raging among the Orthodox. While all Orthodox churches without exception are members of the WCC and participate in ecumenical activity, deep and serious questioning has always existed among the Orthodox about the nature and significance of this participation and activity. This questioning has become more intense in recent years because of the radical changes that have occurred in theological and moral teachings and practices, as well as in sacramental ritual, discipline and behavior within most western churches, including here, in the first instance, the Roman Catholics.

While some Orthodox claim that the Lima statement reflects the fruit of sound ecumenical theologizing and a return to sane and serious ecumenical activity, after what they see to be the secularizing and relativizing captivity of the ecumenical Christian world since the 1960s, there are others who claim that the doctrinal, moral and spiritual decomposition of the western churches that has occurred at this time—whatever the handful of professional theologians who produced BEM have to say—compels the Orthodox to proceed with extreme caution in offering any sort of recognition of Christian belief and behavior in these bodies. The Orthodox have to reach a clear decision in this matter. To what extent are Western Christians Christian? If there is indeed something of Christ and the Church in their churches, which virtually all Orthodox are willing to admit, how is this recognized and affirmed in practice, and what does it mean for the unity of Christians in the one Church of Christ, which all Orthodox believe to be the Orthodox Church? This issue is not only an incredibly complicated one, it is also of critical spiritual significance for the Orthodox. They will answer before God for how they resolve it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>There are people in all Orthodox churches (as well as entire groups not in communion with the Orthodox patriarchates and self-governing churches, such as the so-called "Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia" [the "Synod"], and the old calendarist "True Orthodox Christians" in Greece), who hold that there is nothing of Christ outside the Orthodox Church, and certainly no sacraments. These people claim that the non-Orthodox must be treated as pagans, if not as demon-riddled apostates, and must be exorcised and baptized if they wish to enter the Orthodox Church. This is obviously not the official position of any of the Orthodox churches, all of which participate in the WCC and in ecumenical activity in general. Nor is it the position of many

In addition to the general call to decision concerning the non-Orthodox that the Lima statement presents to the Orthodox, the document makes several specific points of judgment on Orthodox beliefs and practices. The Orthodox insist, for example, that it is proper to baptize infants in the care of believing adults (doing so by immersion) and to bring them to holy communion at the eucharistic gathering. It is well known, however, that this is done in most churches with little or no preparation. The baptizing priest or bishop often does not even know the names of the people, both parents and sponsors, who bring children for baptism and communion, not to mention their actual religious beliefs and moral behavior. The same holds true for participation in the eucharist. In some churches the practice of confession of sins and spiritual openness to one's brothers and sisters in the Lord, at least minimally to one's pastor, has completely disappeared. If these were merely matters of laxity or decadence, there would, for ecumenical purposes, be no great difficulty. The problem, however, is that such behavior is sometimes ideologically defended, even by church leaders, which makes the testimony of the Lima statement, and what it implies for mutual recognition, much more judging upon the Orthodox. For how can the Orthodox demand from others, for the sake of recognition, what they do not demand from themselves, not only in practice, but even in theory?

The issue about the baptism, chrismation and participation of infants in holy communion presents another even greater difficulty. We have seen how Orthodox commentators on the Lima statement stress the fact that baptism, chrismation and communion go essentially together, even for infants. The implication is that churches that do not have such a belief and practice cannot be recognized by the Orthodox, and that the Orthodox cannot have sacramental fellowship with them. It is a well-known fact, however, that there are whole dioceses within the canonical unity of Orthodox patriarchates where infants are regularly baptized by pouring or sprinkling water, and are excluded from participation in the holy eucharist until they make their first confession at about the age of eight or

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Orthodox Christians who seriously question Orthodox membership in the WCC and in the American NCC, who doubt that it is proper and beneficial because of the traditional Orthodox understanding of the nature of church unity and oppose widespread ecumenical views concerning Christian, and particularly *ecclesiastical*, involvement in social and political activities; not to speak of the actual policies and actions in these areas presently conducted by the WCC and NCC leadership, which virtually all Orthodox, for a variety of reasons, find unacceptable.



nine. This practice, which is found among those who have been heavily influenced in Europe by Roman Catholic theology and discipline, most of whom are of Eastern-rite Catholic backgrounds, is often not simply justified by pastoral "oikonomia," but is defended by those who do it as a legitimate practice, indeed even as the proper practice, for Christians.

The issue here is clear. If such is the case (whether it is a pastoral accommodation or a legitimate practice is irrelevant), how can the Orthodox possibly retain full canonical union and sacramental communion with these people, while at the same time criticizing and refusing to recognize the same practices in others outside its canonical boundaries? The Orthodox are obliged to answer this question first of all for themselves, as well as for others.

There are many other questions that the Orthodox have to answer in responding to the Lima statement. How, for example, can the Orthodox insist that baptism, with chrismation and communion, is a communal event involving the whole Church when it is almost always performed semi-privately in a perfunctory manner with but a small group of people attending, very often, in the case of a newborn infant (because of gross misunderstandings of church discipline and tradition), in the absence of the child's own mother? How can the Orthodox insist on the centrality of the eucharist in church life when in so many places the laity (and nonofficiating clergy) do not participate regularly in the sacraments, receiving communion but a few times a year, and even then with questionable practices of preparation? How can the Orthodox claim that the bishops are the sacramental images of Christ in the Church, preserving the unity, identity and solidarity of the Church's faith and life in each place, when in virtually every place in so-called "non-Orthodox countries" there are several bishops who govern not territories of believers, but ethnic enclaves? How can the Orthodox claim collegiality and sobornost in church life when so many bishops in so many churches are cut off from their people, who participate only nominally, if at all, in their elections and appointments, and virtually never have the opportunity for common conversation and direct dialogue? How can the Orthodox affirm a multiplicity of ministries in the Church when the ministry of lay people, particularly women, is generally so severely limited and unsupported by hierarchal and bureaucratic structures, and even by the populace at large? And if the Orthodox oppose the ordination of women to the presbyterate and episcopate, are they prepared to give a good defense of this position that will be convincing to those who are willing to listen?

These and many other questions confront the Orthodox who expose themselves to the Lima statement and allow themselves to be questioned by it. Generally they embrace three areas: (1) Are the Orthodox able to show in fact, through their actual practices, what their formal doctrines and discipline, their official "faith and order," require? And if not, what does this mean for the recognition of others who also deviate from Orthodox ways? (2) Are the Orthodox willing to tolerate in others, for the sake of Christian unity, the same sorts of deficiencies and deviations that they are obviously willing to tolerate in many of their own members? And if not, why not? And (3) are the Orthodox capable of providing clear and convincing explanations of their positions and practice for people of good will not in their churches who are confused and disturbed by Orthodox belief and behavior?

These appear to be the kinds of questions that the Lima statement is asking of the Orthodox churches. It now remains to be seen how they will answer. And this raises an extremely critical "spiritual" question.

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